

Message Text

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O R 291523Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3217

INFO AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 6724

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, UR

SUBJECT: BREZHNEV'S HEALTH

REF: (A) HELSINKI 848 (NOTAL), (B) MOSCOW 6361 (NOTAL),

1. BREZHNEV DID NOT LOOK WELL WHEN HE APPEARED AT THE APRIL 29 FUNERAL OF MARSHAL GRECHKO, ACCORDING TO EMBASSY MILITARY ATTACHES -- INCLUDING EMBASSY PHYSICIAN -- WHO OBSERVED BREZHNEV BRIEFLY FROM A DISTANCE OF ABOUT 10 YARDS AS HE AND OTHER POLITBURO MEMBERS ASSISTED IN CARRYING BIER TO THE KREMLIN WALL. EMBASSY PHYSICIANS'S OBSERVATIONS ARE REPORTED IN DETAIL IN SEPARATE DAO MESSAGE. ON THE OTHER HAND, BREZHNEV WAS OBSERVED BY OTHERS TO WALK UP AND DOWW LENIN MAUSOLEUM STAIRS TWICE WITHOUT APPARENT DIFFICULTY.

2. BREZHNEV ALSO LOOKED UNHEALTHY IN TELEVISION COVERAGE OF THE FUNERAL PROCEEDINGS, ALTHOUGH HE STOOD ERECTLY DURING THE APPROXIMATELY 45-MINUTE CEREMONY AND DID NOT APPEAR TO BE UNCOMFORTABLE. BREZHNEV'S APPEARANCE ON TELEEVISON APRIL 29 SEEMED TO US ABOUT THE SAME AS DURING THE APRIL 22 KREMLIN MEETING COMMEMORATING LENIN'S BIRTHDAY -- TIRED, PUFFY, LINED FACE.

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3. THE FINISH AMBASSADOR -- WHO IN THE PAST HAS TENDED TO

EXAGGERATE BREZHNEV'S ILL HEALTH - FEELS BREZHNEV IS IN POOR PHYSICAL SHAPE. THE FINN THOUGH THAT BREZHNEV LOOKED VERY BAD AT THE APRIL 22 KREMLIN CEREMONY, THAT IN PARTICULAR THE RIGHT SIDE OF BREZHNEV'S FACE WAS "DROOPING" AND HIS MOVEMENTS WERE STIFF. THE FINN RELATED THIS TO A REPORT THAT THE SOVIETS TOLD FINNISH PRESIDENT KEKKONEN THAT TRADITIONAL BREZHNEV-KEKKONEN HUNTING TRIP COULD NOT TAKE PLACE THIS YEAR "BECAUSE THE ANIMALS WERE SICK."

4. COMMENT: SOME OBSERVERS THOUGH THEY SAW TEARS ON BREZHNEV'S FACE DURING FUNERAL CEREMONY. SINCE BREZHNEV IS KNOWN TO BE SENTIMENTAL, AND SINCE GRECHKO WAS A COLLEAGUE OF LONGSTANDING IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT GRIEF ACCOUNTED FOR MUCH OF BREZHNEV'S UNHEALTHY APPEARANCE. ON THE OTHER HAND, HIS FAILURE TO SEE LAO FIRST SECRETARY KAYSONE IS STRIKING AND MAY BE A SOLID INDICATOR THAT HE IS NOT IN GOOD HEALTH.
STOESSEL

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